

# Utah Watershed Review

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## Fire Aftermath:

### Agencies Come Together to Work For Rancher Relief

Three of Utah's major wildfires so far this summer are contained or out, but their impacts individual families, watersheds and wildlife, ranching and farming operations, and local economies will be felt for a long time to come.

Just ask Jim and Carolyn Ockey, of Nephi. The Ockeyes saw their private and public grazing land swallowed up by the fast-moving Salt Creek fire in mid-July. They also lost farm equipment, fences and a private camp ground that their family leases to another party to run the business.

Ockey said he will be forced to sell off his 60 cattle because he cannot afford to buy hay or repair fences to keep the herd from roaming onto public roads.

"It's emotional to lose what you've spent your lifetime building," he said.

Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD) are coordinating relief efforts to assist Utah farmers and ranchers like the Ockeyes in their recovery from losses caused by Utah's major fires. At a news conference in late July, representatives from several state and federal agencies that are part of UPCD outlined the short term and long term steps that their agencies are going to take to help provide relief for ranchers and farmers, and restore watersheds and wildlife habitat.

Highlighting the relief is \$100,000 in special funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) is also seeking a federal disaster declaration.

An estimated 450,000 acres of public and private range land have burned in the Milford Flat, Neola North and Salt



*The Milford Flats fire is currently the largest wildfire in Utah history. Utah wildfires in 2007 have consumed 450,000 acres of public and private rangeland.*

Creek fires. An estimated 90 farmers and ranchers have been affected. About 7,000 cattle have been displaced by the fires, and must be moved to other range or pasture land. Approximately 200 cattle and 70 sheep were killed in the Utah fires.

"There is more at stake here than ranching and rural economies," said Utah Commissioner of Agriculture and Food, Leonard Blackham. The environmental impacts are substantial for all Utahns, and with improved land management practices, these catastrophic fires can be greatly reduced," he added.

The Partners' relief efforts are designed to assist Utah

**See "Wildfires" on page 2**

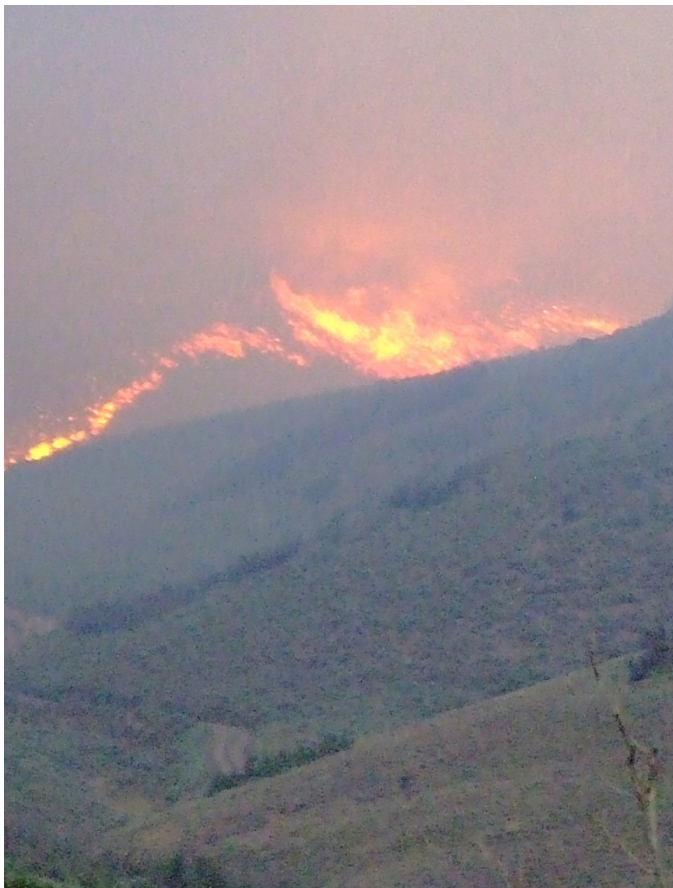
## **“Wildfires” continued from page 1**

ranchers with destroyed fences and equipment, and reestablishing healthy rangelands and offering economic decision tools.

Traditionally, relief for farmers and ranchers has come in the form of low interest loans or livestock access to grazing lands held in reserve. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) is forwarding information to Governor Huntsman in support of a request for a federal agricultural disaster declaration for 25 of Utah's 29 counties. Farm Service Agency is reporting a loss of \$141 million due to fires and drought.

The second phase of the Partners assistance is the reestablishment of healthy watersheds for the protection of water, air, soil, wildlife, and livestock grazing. This effort has a direct tie to protecting the quality of life in Utah.

By September, some of the reserve lands could be opened



*The combination of drought, hot temperatures, wind, cheatgrass and invasive woody plant species resulted in the largest wildfire in Utah history earlier this summer. The impacts of the Milford Flats fire will likely be felt for some time to come.*

for grazing, said Bruce Richeson, Utah executive director of the Farm Service Agency, which oversees the reserve program.

In addition, farmers and ranchers in burned-out areas may qualify for a one-time payment of \$11 per acre for taking their land out of production, allowing charred lands to regenerate. The incentive, however, is limited to 2,500 acres per farmer with a sign-up window of Aug. 1 to Aug. 14, 2007. The efforts of the various agencies may be more helpful to some farmers and ranchers than others impacted by the fires.

“I know there's help on the horizon, but I don't know if there's help next week or not,” said Ockey. The assistance that is on the way won't be in time to preserve the cattle herd he has spent years breeding and maintaining.

“We've got our livestock problem solved for a few years, because we're going out of it. We're going to have to sell them.” Ockey concluded.

Please see the related story on page \_\_\_\_ for more information about farmer and ranchers relief programs being offered.



*The charred landscape will start to produce life again next spring. Land managers will start reseedling this fall.*

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### **Utah Watershed Review:**

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[http://ag.utah.gov/conservation/nps\\_UtahWatershedReview.html](http://ag.utah.gov/conservation/nps_UtahWatershedReview.html)

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## BEAR RIVER SYMPOSIUM & NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION WATER QUALITY CONFERENCE

Date: September 5-7, 2007

Location: Utah State University, Logan, Utah

The Bear River Symposium / Nonpoint Source Pollution Water Quality Conference is a joint conference sponsored by the EPA Bear River Targeted Watershed Initiative and the Utah Nonpoint Source Pollution Task Force. This annual conference covers nonpoint source and other water quality issues throughout the state and region, but this year will have a special focus on the Bear River Watershed.

Conference sessions will cover a range of topics in watershed science and management including special sessions on the Bear River Watershed and the on-line Bear River Watershed Information System.

All those in the water resource field are encouraged to attend, including scientists, researchers, managers, resource specialists, especially farmers, ranchers, educators and any other interested citizens.

For more information and to register, visit [www.bearriverinfo.org](http://www.bearriverinfo.org).



BEAR RIVER WATERSHED  
INFORMATION SYSTEM

*"Providing unprecedented access to data in the Bear River Basin"*

## Ag. Conservation & Development Director Receives Sudweeks Award

George Hopkin, director, division of Conservation and Resource Management, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), has been awarded the prestigious 2007 Calvin K. Sudweeks Water Quality Award for his work in helping reduce agriculture runoff in Utah.

"During the past 15 years, Hopkin has provided the leadership to maintain the excellent collaborative working relationships between the Division of Water Quality (DWQ) and the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food," said Walt Baker, director of DWQ. "George and his staff have managed the day-to-day operation of the Agriculture component of the state's Non-point Management Program that has led to improved water quality."

Every year the Utah Water Quality Board recognizes an individual who has shown outstanding leadership in the

water quality field. The award is named for a former state water quality director who was instrumental in leading Utah through dramatic changes in water quality, including the move to treat wastewater.

Under Hopkin's leadership he has administered and managed nearly \$16 million Clean Water Act grants, with a majority of the money supporting projects to address non-point source pollution. He also administers a state loan program that improves agriculture production and water quality, and provides support to the local Soil Conservation Districts in conducting and sponsoring 319 watershed and demonstration projects to address pollution from agriculture.

"I am honored to be recognized for this achievement," Hopkin said. "Our partnership with Water Quality is essential to helping support agriculture

activities while reducing the amount of pollution in watersheds."

The award was presented at the Water Environment Association of Utah's annual meeting in St. George on April 18, 2007.

# Invasive Species Blamed for Size of Utah Wildfires

## Cheatgrass and Pinyon-Juniper Create Fuel for Fires

Only halfway through the official summer wildfire season, 2007 is likely to go down in history as one of Utah's worst fire seasons on record. We have already had the Milford Flats fire, the largest single wildfire in the state's history.

While most people are focused on providing relief to farmers, ranchers and other rural residents directly impacted by the fires, and others look ahead to reseeding and resource restorations efforts that will get under way in September, some people are looking at the bigger picture and asking why the fires are so large and intense this year.

"We're in this situation basically because of invasive species: primarily cheat-grass and the over-dominance of pinyon-juniper in the state of Utah," said Leonard Blackham, Utah Commissioner of Agriculture and Food.

Utah Farm Bureau CEO Randy Parker said that part of the

problem is that environmental groups" that have gone to court to halt or reduce chaining, allowing "encroaching and expansion of invasive species like pinyon-juniper and cheat grass that are now fueling Utah's wildfires."

But Selma Sierra, with the Bureau of Land Management, said the fires are an opportunity for public and private groups "to come together" in reseeding efforts that will result "in bringing vegetation that will be resistant to fires."

Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), also known as downy brome, is an annual plant native to Eurasia. This aggressive, invasive weed was originally introduced into North America through soils brought by ocean-going vessels and is now a dominant species in the Intermountain West.

Cheatgrass often occurs as a significant component of foothills rangeland vegetation. While cheatgrass is usually found along roadsides and disturbed sites in the east, it is highly abundant

in the west and has invaded disturbed and undisturbed grassland communities to become the dominant species in many lower-elevation areas. Because this species of grass grows quickly in the spring and dies off early, it provides ample fuel for fires by the hottest, driest time of the summer.

Pinyon and juniper also cause increased fire danger by choking out native grasses that could slow the spread of fire.

As this story is being written on the last day of July, all of the wildfires in the state are officially 100 percent contained, which means state and federal crews have turned over mop-up and monitoring responsibilities to local authorities again. Does that mean we had our fire season early this year and the worst is over? Or, should we brace for round two? I guess we'll know in the fall.

## From Fires to Floods: Washington Co. Residents Wonder What's Next

For many Washington County, Utah residents, the summer of 2007 has been marked by one natural disaster after another.

"There's no happy medium here in Dixie," Washington County Sheriff Kirk Smith told the Deseret News. "One week we're sitting on the edge of our seats waiting for a wildfire, the next week we're out in hip boots scraping mud out of our neighbor's basements."

According to the National

Weather Service a downpour that began about 5:30 p.m. dropped up to 3 inches of water. The heavy storm forced the closure of state Route 9 for about two hours and the evacuation of residents of Zion Canyon.

The August 1st flooding is the worst the area has seen since the catastrophic floods of January 2005, which destroyed dozens of homes in the St. George area.

"The one thing that's saved us from

the rain is the mitigation we did after the big flood," Smith said. "The flood channels were opened up."

More than 30 people in the town of Gunlock had to be rescued from the rising water by the County's swift water rescue team, but there were no reported injuries or deaths from the sudden floods. Several homes and cabins were flooded and some pets and farm animals were lost, however.

# Agencies Work to Secure Rancher Relief

## USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

The 2007 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Utah Special Wildfire Initiative has special funds of \$100,000 for Utah wildfire relief available immediately. Additional funds have been requested. Agricultural producers are eligible for a one-time prescribed grazing incentive payment of \$11.00 per acre to assist with the natural regeneration of grazing lands through deferment and exclusion of grazing for one year. The incentive is limited to 2,500 acres per individual or entity.

The sign-up window ins August 1 to 14, 2007.

## USU Extension

The University has established a web site where persons wishing to buy, sell, or donate hay or forage can list that information at <http://extension.usu.edu/buysell/>. Other information is being developed and will be posted on the extension web page

USU Extension will also be holding workshops, in cooperation with other organizations and agencies, to provide economic decision making tools for those not only affected by this summer's fires, but by those affected by the drought. Those desiring information or assistance should contact their local county agent

## Existing Partner Programs

**The UDAF's Grazing Improvement Program (GIP)** has limited funds (up to 50%) available for competitive grants for fence repairs, reseeding of grazing land, and replacement or water development projects.

## Federal Land Agencies (BLM & U.S. Forest Service)

Local offices have been

requested to look for opportunities to provide forage for displaced permittees due to fire as well as drought. Wildfire and drought conditions are making for difficult times for permittees in Utah. They are committed to doing what they can to provide for use of the forage that is available while maintaining healthy range conditions.

Any permittee whose allotment has been affected by a wildfire is encouraged to contact their local BLM or Forest Service office.

**Burned Area Emergency Response, or BAER**, is a program designed to quickly stabilize soil; control water, sediment and debris movement; and mitigate significant threats to health, safety, life, property, and downstream values at risk. The local office can provide information on what is proposed for rehabilitation efforts.

**USDA Farm Service Agency's Livestock Compensation Program (LCP)** - LCP compensates livestock producers for feed losses resulting from natural disasters. (Proposed \$10 million nationally for 2007).

**Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** - ECP provides emergency funding and technical assistance to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters and for carrying out emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought. (Proposed \$16 million nationally 2007).

**Emergency Haying and Grazing of CRP** - Emergency haying and grazing of CRP acreage may be authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disaster. Emergency authorization is provided by either a national FSA office authorization or by a state FSA committee determination utilizing the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to sign up for the

available assistance programs. **Programs are available based on producer eligibility.**

The Utah Partners for Conservation and Development are:

- Utah Soil Conservation Commission
- BLM
- USU Extension Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
- USDA-Farm Service Agency
- Utah Department of Environmental Quality
- Utah Dept. of Natural Resources
- Utah Resource Conservation & Development Councils
- Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services
- Utah Association of Conservation Districts
- National Park Service
- State Institutional Trust Lands Administration
- Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands

# Getting Your Feet Wet with Social Marketing

## *The Workshop*

**Tuesday,  
September 25, 2007  
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

**Utah Department of Agriculture and Food  
350 North Redwood Road,  
Salt Lake City, Utah**

Presented by: Jack Wilbur, principle author,  
Getting Your Feet Wet with Social Marketing:  
A Social Marketing Guide for Watershed Programs

**Cost \$10.00  
Lunch and breaks included  
All workshop materials provided**

## **During the Day You will:**

### **Learn the Basics of Social Marketing:**

**The concept of Exchange,  
The Four P's of Marketing,  
How to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your  
organization, coalition, association, etc.. and  
How to assess you target audiences through marketing research**

Please Email [jackwilbur@utah.gov](mailto:jackwilbur@utah.gov) if you have any questions, or for more information.